



## Power of a Positive Attitude!

### *What's Your Attitude Toward Inclusion?*

Attitudes and beliefs are very personal; they form the basis for how we perceive the world. Early childhood professionals' responses to young children and their families are affected by attitudes and beliefs in very real ways. Because of the impact of attitudes and beliefs, becoming aware of them is critical.

Becoming aware of attitudes and beliefs is as important as seeking new knowledge, reading current literature, and developing early childhood skills. You can get in touch with your own personal attitudes and beliefs about inclusion by paying attention to your emotional responses to and reflecting on ideas and events. Here are a few questions to help you:

- \* What am I feeling right now?
- \* Why do I feel this way?
- \* Why do I always avoid that situation?
- \* Why do I feel so excited/frustrated about this new information?
- \* Why do I feel comfortable (or uncomfortable) when people talk about this topic?
- \* Where might my response be coming from?

Asking these questions whenever you feel strong emotions can make attitude assessment a natural part of your learning process. While taking such a close look at yourself may not be easy or comfortable, your attitude is directly related to your ability to confidently care for your children with disabilities.

#### **A Parent's Story**

I did not even want to take Chi to preschool. I am his mother and teacher; we play and learn together every day. Since we moved to the United States, I noticed the faces of people we met at the market and at the park. Sometimes I see pity; sometimes I see them look away. Sometimes they talk to me and pretend Chi is not there. I want him to get an education. I want him to have friends his own age. I want him to belong in the community. I asked myself, am I being too protective?

I agreed to look at preschools to give Chi experiences playing and learning with other children. I was prepared for many bad experiences. I took the list of preschools in my neighborhood. I asked each one for materials and information. I studied them one by one. I was looking for an accepting place for Chi. One of them stood out. I asked myself, could this kind of acceptance and individual concern be real?

I wanted to know more. I called the woman and made an appointment to bring Chi to meet her and look at her preschool. I wanted to see her face. When we arrived, I watched closely. I did not see pity; she did not turn away. She did not talk to me and pretend Chi was not there. She bent down and talked to Chi. She gave him a toy she saw him looking at. She let him take it home. She said he would bring it back the next time he came to play with her.

I went with Chi when the other preschoolers were there. I watched their faces. They did not look with pity; they wanted him to play. They showed him the toys. They took him to see the bunny. They asked me if he could come again. Now I take Chi to preschool every morning. He is getting better prepared to go to school. I ask myself, how are we so lucky?



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### A Child Care Provider's Question

**QUESTION:** I really believe that I would welcome any child in my program but I am hearing alarming stories from other child care providers. Is a positive attitude really enough?

**ANSWER:** While there is sometimes a big gap between attitude and ability, a positive attitude can have an incredible effect on your approach to the challenges that will most surely arise for you as a child care provider. A positive attitude is often described as a “can do” or a “why not” perspective. This position creates an open door for new ideas, new information, and new skills.

Attitudes serve as filters for everything that is said about a child. For instance, let's say a child comes to your program who, you are told, has been asked to leave several other early childhood settings. While this information may make you anxious, a positive attitude will make it more likely that you will look at a number of factors, explore many solutions, and use every skill at your disposal to work with the family to make your program a good placement for this child. Contrast this response with that

of the individual who tells her director she is not prepared to deal with any of “those kids.”

Your attitude filter impacts your choices for professional development, your ability to develop skills, and your willingness to make changes in your program. For example, your positive attitude makes it more likely that you would be willing to learn how to perform an unfamiliar medical procedure or acquire sign language skills.

The simple truth is that inclusion is more likely to work when you believe it can. Attitudes affect our acquisition of knowledge as well as our ability to use that knowledge effectively. Your attitude towards problems and challenges directly affects not only your response to them but the probability of a successful outcome for everyone involved, including you. Is a positive attitude enough, probably not, but it is almost enough.

### Resources:

**Disability is Natural: New Attitudes—**

<http://www.disabilityisnatural.com/explore/new-attitudes>

**Changing attitudes towards people with disabilities**

[http://www.unicef.org/disabilities/index\\_66543.html](http://www.unicef.org/disabilities/index_66543.html)

**A Thinking Guide to Inclusive Child Care, Disability Rights Wisconsin**

<http://www.disabilityrightswi.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/02/thinking-guide-to-inclusive-child-care.pdf>

### Training Opportunities:

**The Registry Training Calendar**

<https://www.the-registry.org>

**WI Early Care Association (WECA) Training Calendar**

<http://wisconsinearlychildhood.org/>

**MECA Special Needs Support Program (SNSP)**

<http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/childcare/meca/snsp/default.htm>

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